

Directing Specialism Report

In this essay, I look to explore my final year's major project, with specific reference to my specialisms – **directing and script writing**. I analyse the relationship between those specialisms over the course of my project, 'Stationary Bike', critically examining individual areas which were integral to the process in order fully understand what it took to make my project come to life. I examine my influences and how those influences affected my production, from narrative to cinematic style, to the emotional contagion of working as a team.

To begin with, I want to start with a quote which perfectly summarises how I intend to articulate my views on both the script writing and film direction processes for 'Stationary Bike': "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest." (Hinett, 2002). Firstly, I start with stage one, which is my reflections on 'Stationary Bike' including references to my dissertation on the auteur theory, before moving onto my influences and inspirations for my project, before finally turning to the actual filming itself, including the final stage of post production which affected the final product.

Over the course the production I came to learn my biggest lesson, which was that the film I created in my mind, compared to the actual filming, and then the film in edit, were three very separate creations. It is for this reason that Hinett's three steps to wisdom felt so apt to me. In my own specialisms, I have favored the writing over the directing considerably, however, as time progressed I switched between the two - writer and director. As Edward Bulwer-Lytton states: "To my mind a writer should sit down to compose a fiction as a painter prepares to compose a picture" (Stang, 1959). Over the course of the project, the story I originally wanted to tell kept its form, so that I remained true to Bulwer-Lytton's view, however, its structure changed.

One such example was the active experimentation of breaking down one scene, the bike scene which is where the central character rides the titular 'Stationary Bike; while watching his old movies as he rides. I had created a small scene in my second year project but I wanted to do something different and to steer away from the norm. This key scene was integral to the story and was the starting point for which I was to expand on however in order to do so, I had to first analyse my own style and vision for this project. "In clinical practice students would benefit from discussing how reflective practice works, such as helping make the unconscious conscious" (James, 2005). This quote perfectly captures my realisation of the unconscious influence on me for my project, the influence in question being Stanley Kubrick whose theory of the 'Unconscious filmmaker' also explores the premise of film makers who create films which share similar themes and patterns without truly realizing that they are doing so. As a filmmaker who has only just made his first short film this is a clear sign of the steps I must take.

As part of my reflections, I had originally considered director Richard Linklater a key influence on me, this being due to the fact that his films followed a free flowing structure. However, over the course of my project I realised that was not the case. Rather, Linklater switched to Kubrick and I found myself agreeing with Kubrick's view that filmography falls into blocks of similar themes or storylines, each block representing a different part of yourself. Throughout my work I have developed key characteristics such as minimal dialogue; a key focus on film adaptations based from a literary source; tracking shots; prolonged scenes; and emotionally distant characters with an emphasis on using that emotional distance to highlight the fragility and diversity of the human nature. By just bringing these key patterns to the light, I started to make the unconscious, conscious, and in doing so I was able to experiment with the filming of the bike scene. Firstly, changing from shooting on the right hand side to the left to simply play with the connotations of the scene and how uneasy it would make the audience. As it was a psychological thriller it became about how do we play with the audience's mind and what would they take from the scene.

The second key step in my reflective process, was my understanding of the auteur theory. Following my research into the auteur theory, my dissertation posed the question – is it always the case that a film director has a select style that represents him and, further, that his best films are those in which the film maker makes an active effort to put a personal aspect of themselves into it? As French critic Francois Truffaut states: "A true film auteur is one who brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of merely producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material" (Truffaut, 1954). Author John Steinbeck also states: "A man who tells secrets or stories must think of who is hearing or reading, for a story has as many versions as it has readers. Everyone takes what he wants or can from it and thus changes it to his measure." (Steinbeck, 1961). This quote is a perfect example of my dissertation's premise, Would I have to kill Stephen King in the process of making my film as my major cinematic influence Stanley Kubrick did or could I live side by side with my adaptation?

While my dissertation focused on the adaptations of Stephen King, I believe that the auteur theory is a truism for me in that the poignant patterns of my film making are integral to my journey as a film maker, and it is these personal traits that I have incorporated within my project. By way of example, I deliberately changed Stephen King's source material where the paintings come to life, and switched this to a super 8 home movie system coming to life. This was to represent my youth, as well as paying personal homage to those film directors I aspired to be and who had all started filming with a super 8 camera and film. The next was to bring focus on the husband and wife relationship as it not only brought to the forefront the key themes I wanted to tackle which were longing and love. Both of these changes allowed me to mark my own stamp as a film maker and writer, adding to my Favourite author's work, creating a possible prequel to the short story. As Stanley Kubrick said in his own words: "The screen is a magic medium. It has such power that it can retain interest as it conveys emotions and moods that no other art form can hope to tackle" (Aurora, 2015). To put it pure and simply, my project not only framed me as a filmmaker and writer, but as a human being.

My final reflections centre around my role as writer and director alongside the role of the film crew and team in making 'Stationary Bike'. "The leader as a reflective practitioner sets

the tone for learning. Leaders should ideally also take a significant role in the change process by engaging in personal transformation, and become coaches and facilitators serving others. Sustainability and continuity of learning initiatives seem to be much more prevalent in organizations where leaders 'lead by learning' and are fully engaged in the process, assuming a leadership role in the transformation." (Zeniuk, 2004). Up until the time for filming of my project, I had been prone to not thinking about what the last three years had been building up to and that what I was doing would be seen outside of university. Instead, I had seen myself only in terms of a competitor to my classmates for an ultimate degree qualification. However, prior to filming, I made an active decision to think differently and consider myself instead as a future film maker and script writer in the film Industry. This led me to change the lead character from a typical white male (often seen in Stephen King adaptations) to a black actor, thus totally changing the perspective and the outlook of the project. This came into effect on set where I worked closely with Kwesi. Zeniuk's quote was forever in my mind as I worked with my leading man, and made the personal transformation from translating an idea I had in my English class aged 14 to then studying media at aged 16 to university to study film at aged 19, and then finally as film maker aged 21 with the ultimate goal of changing the outlook and perception of the entire audience. Kwesi was the first actor I had ever worked with and I had no prior working or personal relationship with before. We were just two artists, both with ideas about what the 'Stationary Bike' story was about, and what the project was trying to achieve. Working with him enabled the project to transcend from a task to a real intimate experience in which part of me was given to the project. One of my biggest weaknesses during previous university projects had been not being comfortable working with a big team or working outside of my comfort zone but this project forced me to face my issues head on and face what kind of person I am and want to be.

This project was a perfect example of learning by leading and doing. It was also an example where team contagion can risk the final product. As Zeniuk further states: "Sustainability and continuity of learning initiatives seem to be much more prevalent in organizations where leaders 'lead by learning' and are fully engaged in the process, assuming a leadership role in the transformation." (Zeniuk, 2004). As a director my vision was very clear from the experimentation stages but, as I have stated, I had never done a project like this before. Whatever challenges the crew and actors would face we would have to face it together but the biggest challenge was brought on by something we never took into account and that was a logistical issue presented by the owner of the location. The logistical issue that arose was that the owner alleged we had caused damage to the house so that we could not make actual changes to the room which was where the most integral part of the story would take place. The stationary bike scenes were to be last so we could spend the majority of the second half of the second day on them. The change in circumstances were brought to my attention in the final moments of the filming of the integral scene so that designs had to change. My nervousness and clear anxiety concerning the completion of the film played not only on my mind but my team's. To me, this was a project that has been rooting around in my head since I was fourteen years old so I had a strong personal attachment to it. To all of the crew and to the heads of our university department, this project was one of the two projects on which we were going to be marked. This project would also represent all of us as filmmakers in the real world.

The three stages of the emotional contagion were taking hold - from my own individual anxieties to my personal leadership of the team, my interpersonal relationship with the team as we tried to work out how we could film the scene differently to that originally intended, and then finally with the relationship with the owner. By taking a step back and looking at the situation, Judith McNamara and Rachel Field critically analyses that "The capacity to reflect on one's own strength and weaknesses, to learn from constructive criticism, and to practice critical reflection by monitoring one's own work performance and interpersonal interactions is essential to the ability to learn from experience and is the cornerstone of the journey to becoming a lifelong learner" (Field, 2007). To deconstruct this the idea further, the final scene in 'Stationary Bike' took on a life of its own and was made into something else. This was a key turning point for me as it offered a chance to show that I had to accept help from my team and trust they could do their jobs. More importantly, I truly took this moment as a key learning point for my future films – that is, I should ward against seeing everything as final and as something that the film will follow exactly. Rather, I have learned that I need to be flexible in my approach and leadership, accepting that change will happen, and the end result may well be different to that which I originally intended.

The last stage of the film was the edit which in itself became something that I had never envisioned. Stephen King himself stated: "The scariest part is always just before you start" (King, 2000). As apparent over the course of this essay, a recurring theme of the project is the impact of "Change". For me, the scariest part of the project was not just at the start although "Change" eventually became an ally. The emotional contagion I referred to above was not just limited to the production but to the edit itself. Myself and my editor were both somewhat defeated in the first cut. Nevertheless, the shoot to the edit opened up a different pathway to a film which was a more clinical and precise telling of the story. The hardest part was accepting that reality and allowing what I originally wanted to be included in the film to be axed. This led to a more positive part of the emotional contagion within the team, with growing enthusiasm and excitement in perhaps taking this project further than we had all thought possible. The contagion spread fast. As Steen Hoyrup & Bente Elkjaer describe reflective practice: "the practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of, what has recently transpired to us and to others in our immediate environment. It illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action." (Elkjaer, 2006).

In conclusion, the project had made leaps and bounds and it was only later that I truly realised what the project was and appreciated it for what it was. The dream of making a Stephen King production had started when I was given the 'Stationary Bike' short story by my grandmother. She passed away that year, and it was only when I finished filming that I realised that this story was about letting go. The longing to see a loved one again and the forgiveness to move on. The process of putting yourself into the production and the consequences of emotional contagion boiled down to one moment. Saying goodbye to my grandmother.

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